

# RUSSIA RAMBLINGS



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**SERVING OUR LORD IN RUSSIA, NOVEMBER**  
SARAH HARMS, LCMS NEWSLETTER

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# A rainy Sunday at St. Anne's



## Settling in & Saddling Up

### WELCOMING NEWCOMERS TO THE FIELD

At the end of this summer Rev. Charles Cortright and his wife, Connie, along with Alyssa Anders and myself were pleased to welcome Rev. Jerry Lawson and his family (pictured below) to our growing LCMS ex-pat team here in St. Petersburg. Since their arrival, they have been settling into the Russian life as Rev. Lawson prepares to take his position at the Ingrian Theological Institute outside the city this November.

Although our obligations often take us in different directions to fulfill our respective roles here, it has truly been a rich experience taking part in this tiny, mighty cell of a congregation. Flung far from our four differing U.S. states and common country, I continue to see how God is molding and shaping us for His purposes. We are certainly blessed with one another's fellowship and I am grateful for a group of individuals all willing to serve God in this way during this season of Thanksgiving!



## Prayers & Thanks



We ask that God would continue to lead us, strengthen us, and if it is His will, allow our new visas to be granted quickly!

That God would help us to build trust with orphanage directors and graduated orphans. That the St. Anne's youth will be able to attend Higher Things in 2020. That we will continue having access to a facility for English Club and that the contacts we make there would be used for God's glory.

We give thanks for the recent baptisms and



# LOST... AND FOUND

Think back to when you were first leaving home. Perhaps you were off to college, a new job, military service, or were even getting ready to walk down the aisle and start a new life. Were you excited? Anxious? Imagine that you are 16, have never possessed anything of your own, had a penny to your name, or even so much as had the independence to choose your lunch. Without any family or support system you are now expected to walk out the front door of the only place you have ever known because it is too crowded with other children for you to stay. You are expected to go out into the world as an adult now, with a \$120 monthly stipend and your name on a waiting list for shared housing. There is a 50% chance that you will become homeless and, as a result, get caught up with crime, sex trafficking or fall into any number of other high risk circumstances. At 16, you now have a 20% chance of making it on your own, and a 90% chance of dying before your 40th birthday. That is the reality for at least 650,000 orphans in Russia, over half of which are right now just twelve years old and completing the 6th grade-- likely the highest level of education they will ever receive.

Who, then are these nameless, faceless statistics? Let me introduce you to one of them. There is a poster, of the sort I'm sure you've seen and are all too familiar with. It displays a photo of a girl with short, dark-blond hair, light blue eyes and a quiet smile. I'll refer to her as Jade. She is holding her child, an infant daughter who is her mirror image. At the top of the poster, in red bold font it reads: **пропали люди**-- *Lost People*. Underneath it says: **помогите найти!** *Help find me!*

It was issued by the orphanage where Jade grew up and went missing about two years ago. Her infant daughter is still there, having become an orphan herself. When I met Jade, the shy looking girl was no longer smiling, but rather she was-- understandably, afraid of being left alone, couldn't care for herself, and had been through more than anyone ever should.

Jade is not just a statistic. She likes music and has a sense of humor; she is a mother, a survivor, and was made in the image of our God. It is the goal of Hannah House to create a safe place where young people like Jade can be welcomed, taught the life skills they need to thrive and be given the physical, emotional, spiritual and psychological care they need to break a vicious cycle of which they were born into through no fault of their own. For this, we must build relationships within the orphanage system and among the community.



## HANNAH HOUSE FACILITY & TEAM MEETING



That way, when the time comes that the next sixteen year old faces the door out into the world, they can say with confidence, "I know a place I can go where I will be welcomed, I have friends there who care for me." We know we cannot provide for every graduated orphan who comes through our door. But we know the One who can, and will. For His doors are always open and He has prepared a place for each of us. We, without Christ, would all be **пропали люди**, in need of being found.

Jade's story is not over, and it is clear that the Lord is building up a community here around her. She has a long road ahead, but she is no longer walking it alone. Already, with the help of various Christians, (the Hannah House believers and friends) we have begun to see a glimmer of a better future for Jade and other young people. We are privileged to enter into their story, just as Jesus has invited all of us into His.

# TEAMWORK & TEACHING

## ENGLISH CLUB



Wednesday night means English Club! Led by my fellow LCMS colleague Alyssa Anders and myself, we have been meeting once a week to lead English discussion group to those who are interested here in St. Petersburg. The group is open to individuals who want to get some language practice in and make a few new friends along the way. We gather as many as 30 or more at a time, all crammed into our tiny teaching space! Each week we have a themed topic, tea, games and generally a great time getting to know one another. Although this lesson is based on language it has led to multiple friendships outside the class with locals and, in turn, has led to opportunities to share what we believe, invite people to the church, and help connect people with the Lutheran community.



## SUNDAY CATECHISM

Between English and Russian services at St. Anne's I was asked to teach English to two girls from the congregation (pictured far right). Since my arrival last winter, our small class has doubled and turned into not just an English lesson, but a small youth group where we are currently studying Luther's Small Catechism. Although we were not able to make it to last year's National Youth Gathering in MN, we are striving to attend the Higher Things Conference next spring. For these believers it would be an incredible opportunity and, God willing, we will make it in 2020 to the USA!



# GOD DOESN'T MAKE mistakes

Saint Anne's Ingrian Lutheran Church was established in 1775, but unfortunately was closed in 1935. For a time it was used as a theater, then a rock club, and most people remember it as such. Sadly, the building was burn in a fire before being returned to the Ingrian Lutheran church in recent years. Piece by piece, it is being restored but in the meantime our church body is alive and growing!



A few Sundays ago the Russian service at St. Anne's held confirmation Sunday in the burnt sanctuary of the church. The Russian service is small, and thus was not expecting to need to make many preparations. Imagine our surprise when, minutes before the service, a parishioner ran into the sacristy and announced, "We need to rope off seats for the congregation!" For no known reason, a rumor had spread to the public that there would be a concert at St. Anne's. This had not been advertised by us as it simply was not true. Yet (as pictured above), the entire hall, as well as the balcony, was filled.



Bishop elect Ivan Laptev made the announcement that everyone, in fact, was in attendance of a church service, but, to our continued surprise, the church remained filled. Hundreds of people who mistakenly came for a concert instead were witnesses to several baptisms (pictured above) and the confirmations of faith (pictured right). Not only that, but they heard the Gospel shared and God's Word proclaimed! If you are receiving my newsletter online, click the green & orange buttons at the start of this email to download two short clips where you can see our full house and listen to God being praised in Russian!



To support me in this ministry please send your tax-deductible gift to: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod P.O. Box 66861 St. Louis, MO 63166-6861. Make checks payable to: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Mark checks "Support of Sarah Harms." Gifts can also be given securely online through the LCMS website, on my online giving page at [www.lcms.org/harms](http://www.lcms.org/harms). You can also send your support to my friends at: Mission Central 407818 Highway E-16 Mapleton, Iowa 51034 Contact Sarah: [sarah.harms@lcms.org](mailto:sarah.harms@lcms.org)